

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Hurricane Sandy's Effect on the October 2012 Monthly Retail Trade Survey (MRTS)**

### **Can the Census Bureau estimate the effect of Hurricane Sandy on the monthly retail sales and inventories estimates for October 2012?**

No. We cannot isolate the effect of Hurricane Sandy on the Monthly Retail Trade and Food Services estimates since the sample is designed to measure retail and food services activity at the national level and not at specific geographic areas.

Even though we cannot isolate the effect, we did receive indications from companies that the hurricane had both positive and negative effects on the retail data. Some firms reported a drop in sales or increased inventories due to power outages and closures. Other firms reported decreased inventories due to damages suffered from the storm. In addition, many firms reported that Hurricane Sandy did not affect them.

Please see <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/emergencies/sandy.html> for data from the 2007 Economic Census and other Census Bureau sources on the areas impacted by Hurricane Sandy.

### **Can the Census Bureau produce monthly retail and food services sales estimates for the affected areas?**

No. We cannot separately estimate retail sales for the affected areas since the MRTS sample is designed to estimate sales for the national level only.

### **Was the Census Bureau able to collect information from firms operating within the affected areas?**

Yes, although response from companies in the affected areas lagged behind recent months. However, many large, regional, and other multi-location firms with reporting offices outside the affected areas responded at a normal rate and included sales data for stores, both open and closed, located in the affected areas. For the entire survey, we received 6,675 responses this month, compared to the previous 12-month range of 6613 to 6894 responses.

### **How does the survey account for businesses affected by the hurricane?**

Large companies with multiple locations are asked to report total U. S. sales and inventories for all retail locations, including locations in the affected areas. Most companies located in the affected areas had no difficulty reporting this month. MRTS

accounts for missing data through its imputation procedure. This procedure makes use of data from companies that report both September and October data.

**Did the Census Bureau change its data collection procedures this month?**

Yes. Our data collection staff asked additional questions with regard to the impact of Hurricane Sandy on October 2012 sales as part of our regular follow-up.

**As a result of Hurricane Sandy, did the Census Bureau modify its usual weighting or estimation methods used to produce monthly sales estimates for October 2012?**

No. Because the sample is designed to measure retail and food services sales at the national level and not at specific geographic areas; there is not sufficient evidence to support a change.

**Has the reliability of the monthly sales estimates changed because of Hurricane Sandy?**

No, the reliability of the monthly estimates as measured by the coefficient of variation for monthly totals and the standard error for month-to-month change has not changed substantially. For the published industries, reported sales for October 2012 exhibited variation similar to that for prior months. While a few individual firms reported large increases or decreases in their sales because of the effects of the hurricane, this additional variation was not large enough to substantially affect the reliability of the published estimates.

**Did the Census Bureau alter the parameters input to the seasonal adjustment program to produce monthly sales estimates for October 2012?**

No. The monthly review process of the seasonal adjustment output and diagnostics did not indicate that adjustments to the parameters were necessary for this month.

**Did the Census Bureau change its analytical procedures for the October 2012 MRTS?**

Yes. In addition to the usual analysis done every month, we reviewed independent data sources and discussed the effects of the hurricanes with companies on the survey. For companies impacted by Hurricane Sandy, we reviewed their contribution to the estimates to ensure accurate representation to the overall industry estimates.

**What activities are the Census Bureau planning to ensure the affected areas will continue to be accurately represented?**

As part of our data collection, we will continue to ask questions that will help us monitor impacts from the affected areas. We will monitor data responses and make adjustments if necessary.

Source: U. S. Census Bureau  
Service Sector Statistics Division

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